honours, have not hesitated to join in the cry, and to depreciate the merits of those views upon which, modified and improved by their own enlarged opportunities, they endeavour to raise an independent and personal claim to originality.

It matters little to the true interests of science, although it may be of some consequence to our own convenience, whether a certain assemblage of species be termed a Subgenus or a Genus, a Family or an Order; whether we restrict the appellations of groups to the terms Kingdom, Class, Order and Genus, admitting intermediate anonymous sections or divisions, or whether we introduce such terms as Subkingdom, Family, Tribe, Cohort, Subgenus, and the rest of the thousand and one names which have sometimes aided, and perhaps as often burthened the mind of the student. To appreciate duly the advantages which Natural History has derived from the labours of the learned Swede, we should consider not only the state of the science when he undertook the Herculean task of reducing it to order, but the immense range of objects to which he endeavoured to apply his newly discovered views. It is perhaps no unfair test of a writer's claim to individual merit, to measure that claim by the meed of credit which he himself awards to the real deserts of others. Were this rule to be fairly applied, how many of the popular authors of the present day would sink into nothingness when compared with those great and original minds which they affect to contemn, but to which they ignorantly owe perhaps all that is really meritorious in their own vaunted productions. It is fair to avail ourselves honestly and openly of all the advantages to be obtained from the labours of our predecessors; but it is unfair, it is degrading to the science we profess, when, by a fraud, not often punishable by human laws, but not the less contrary to sound faith and honour, we desecrate, as it were, the sublime and holy object of our devotion, the grandeur and purity of which might well shame us from conduct so disgraceful, and excite in us feelings elevated far above such mean and unworthy considerations.

The confusion in which Linnæus left the Testudinata was but little improved by his successor Gmelin, who, though he considerably augmented the number of names, added but little to our real information as to the characters of the species. An attempt was made by Schneider* to embody, in a descrip-

* *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte der Schildkröten*; von Johan Gottlob Schneider, 1783.

tive monograph, the species then known, which, according to his list, amounted to eighteen; of these, three are probably the young of species otherwise named in the same list, which reduces the number known by this naturalist to fifteen. His descriptions are generally sufficiently full for the purpose of ascertaining the species intended; but it is also evident, from the stress which he lays upon some of the general characters, that he was not aware of their real value, nor able to distinguish between those which belong to a whole division of the group and those which characterize species only. The "Chelonographia" of Wallbaum, and the scattered additions made about the same period by other writers, prepared the way for that portion of the "Histoire Naturelle des Quadrupèdes ovipares et Serpens," which relates to Tortoises, by the Comte de Lacépède, who contributed this addition to the celebrated "Histoire Naturelle" of the Comte de Buffon. It would be no easy matter to analyse satisfactorily this elaborate work. That much was effected by it towards the improvement of Erpetology cannot be denied; but so much confusion of names and characters still remained to perplex the student of this branch of Zoology, as to leave perhaps little room for unqualified praise. The uncertainty which, from the first, attached to the specific distinctions of these animals, arising from the want of attention to essential characters, and the differences existing between the young and adult state of many species, still obtained. The total absence, also, of anything like a fully illustrated monograph was, under these circumstances, a fatal obstacle to the acquisition of a correct knowledge of the described species.

This great desideratum was however undertaken by Schœpff, who, in 1792, commenced his "Historia Testudinum*." His object was to give figures of every known species; but his premature death prevented the completion of the work. As far as it went, the figures are exceedingly correct and well executed; the accounts of the species full and clear, and the lists of the synonyms evince not only an extensive acquaintance with all that had before been written on the subject, but also no inconsiderable judgement in ascertaining and clearing up the doubtful and confused synonymy of previous authors. There is, however, no attempt at arrangement; the whole of the species are still included under the one generic term *Testudo*, and the land, the fresh-water, and

* J. D. Schœpff, *Historia Testudinum iconibus illustrata*. Erlangæ, 1792, et sequent.